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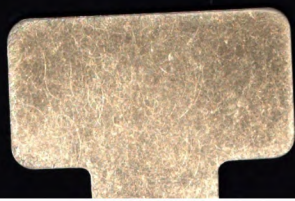
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*THE
ANGELIC NATURE*



141. m. *FREDERICK THRUPP*

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THE ANGELIC NATURE.

AN ESSAY.

BY FREDERICK THRUPP.



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THE ANGELIC NATURE.



THE varied opinion of art critics on this widely interesting subject touches on one point sometimes with doubtful assent, sometimes with stern condemnation of its propriety ; and this, the appearance or the form of the angelic nature. So that what artists have done and are now doing is open to the censure of many who do not use their imaginative powers with pencil in hand.

Wings to an angel, these wingless critics say, this is an absurd image, anatomically impossible ; a vesture awkward in the way devised, without beauty,

without necessity of appliance, and without authority. And were these objections undeniably strong, then ought we to err no more : we should do well to recognize our past errors, and to give to the representation of the angelic nature what the common sense of the critic sees to be based on truths of natural form. But are his judgments unassailable and fixed truths? Are the anatomical critics and the others so sure of the ground on which they stand? Have they searched the Holy Scriptures for all the knowledge that has been revealed to us? It is found only in a few places, here and there, and I will glean from them portions that may justify my doubt of their sound objections. Now, whatever has been revealed to us, Heaven sent, has especial claim to our reverent regard in our coming discussion of this controverted point. When it is given in general terms we must not add to it, or diminish from it. Also, when it is described in exact terms

we must receive it as the true vision of the prophets.

Away then with individual fancies and suppositions of things existing, which things may not be in existence, or may not be proved to exist. Search and prove.

Angels of God. These are almost always messengers of good, as we read in the Bible : "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." "And the angel said, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men." "And the angel said unto him, I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God, and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings." "And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary, thou hast found

favour with God." These selections show the angelic nature to be closely associated with man, having like feelings, and souls alike for worship of the Deity, bringing down heaven to earth within hearing and seeing, raising up man to heaven in praise and gratitude. "Hereafter ye shall see heaven opened, and angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man." And more than this indicated resemblance, spiritual and mental, do we recognize one of form and outward proportion, shown in what follows : "And it came to pass as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold two men stood by them in shining garments." In St. John, "She stooped down and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white sitting." "And entering into the sepulchre they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment, and they were affrighted." "And behold there was a great earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended

from heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow, and for fear of him the keepers did shake and became as dead men." Their angelic nature at once being evident to those approached by them, we are certain that sometimes it was accompanied by a light or radiance in the face or around the person, but we cannot be certain that they were clothed with wings.

But when I say that we cannot be quite certain whether or not Gabriel appeared mantled with wings in his message to Mary, but must rather suppose that on this and similar occasions of heavenly communications, these ministers of grace had no wings, we may read in Isaiah, "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain

he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." "Then flew one of the seraphims unto me." Also it is written in Exodus, chapter xxxvii., "And he made two cherubims of gold, beaten out of one piece made he them, on the two ends of the mercy seat; one cherub on the end on this side, and another cherub on the other end on that side: out of the mercy seat made he the cherubims on the two ends thereof. And the cherubims spread out their wings on high, and covered with their wings over the mercy seat, with their faces one to another; even to the mercy seatward were the faces of the cherubims." Also we read in the Revelation of St. John, "And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness." Also in chapter iv., "And in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes

before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him ; and they were full of eyes within : and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty.”

We may suppose that the millions of worshippers before the throne in heaven are ranged in hierarchies, principalities, authorities, dominions, powers, variously endowed and entrusted with differing charges, offices, and duties, and these clad in strangely varied features, forms, and lineaments, as the beings on earth and in the sea are varied and differing.

And what surmounts the reach
Of human sense, I shall delineate so,
By likening spiritual to corporal forms,
As may express them best, though what if earth
Be but the shadow of heaven and things therein,
Each to other like more than on earth is thought.

Enough is revealed to us of earth and its creatures to convince us that the works of the Creator are in number, extent, and purpose without limit, and to say what cannot or what may not be in heaven is to be bold indeed. This is the boldness and insolence of ignorance, not of knowledge. Having then walked the boundaries of revealed records with this particular matter in view, and submitted to the seemingly proved fact that the angelic vesture was not winged when on earthly errands of mercy, we have now to stand well fortified with reason on our usurped ground, and to show the gain and advantage of evading the truth, if truth it be.

First in the argument we must fly off at a tangent, and state that we deal not with the natural body but with the spiritual. We think not of bones and flesh, a heavy body bound to earth, but of a spiritual one, spoken of by St. Paul as greatly different in its glory. Conceive a body so little heavy that the earth's gra-

vity does not draw it down, moving in space, up or down, forward and backward, as freely as fish move or dart in the water. The common house-fly seems hardly to be affected by the law of gravitation ; yet this is not a spiritual body. The electric current is frightfully excelling in its course, and yet even that is not spiritual ; so that we have to draw on paper the lineaments of a creature gifted with qualities more exalted and fine than anything we can possibly imagine ; more rapid in motion than lightning, more dreadful at times than a death summons. Sometimes these messengers appeared with a light or radiance in the face, or around the person, not such as anything earthly could give them. This alone would not characterize the heavenly glories. In a picture an angel represented without wings would bring at first sight, even to the most intelligent mind, doubts and wants of a ready explanation.

Such are the necessities of the art that the figure

of a young man drawn as in the act of addressing Mary, the mother of our Lord, would convey the idea of his being only a man. The looker-on would exclaim, "How am I to know that this is the angel Gabriel? She is a woman and he just a man." The alternative might be that of writing the title, Gabriel, underneath. The comment on that might be, "Yes, but you seem to be obliged to add writing to your art." Inasmuch then as every design ought to explain itself, and it should need no supplementary aid, it must be done in the most simple and direct mode and manner. I will add wings, to show that he can fly from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven.

We have then to justify our departure from what may have been the true aspect to the eye, and our use of that which is true to the mind's eye, and which meets the full requirement of the art. For the mind needs to be gratified and informed as

well as the sense of sight. The poet uses excess of epithet and metaphor, speaking to the imaginative workings of the human soul, and lighting up the thoughts, not only by report of his eyes, but by his feelings ; so the artist affects symbols, and these symbols are also facts or truths of nature : wings to indicate speed ; the goat's horns and ears and legs on the man's body, to represent the half civilized mountain peasant ; the centaur, half man half horse, for the savage man of the wilderness, ready for rapine, or any lawless violence on women ; the monkey-faced, long-tailed faun, for the rioting, intemperate, half civilized man of the woods. The winged man-headed lion images that irresistible power of the Assyrian monarch, swift as an eagle, terrible as a lion ; the mitred head with horns denoting kingly power.

These speak to the mind with a truth, though goat's legs on a man's body we may safely affirm were never seen by any of us.

These uses of a parabolic invention are the necessities of a high teaching. How can we otherwise describe to the eye the degradation of the human life and nature, depraved from good, the loss of God's image in man's outward form? We are forced to take away the highest glories of which he boasts, and in their stead we give him what belongs to the irrational beasts of the field.

The Psalmist in his upward song said, "The waters saw Thee and were afraid, the depths also were troubled." "Let the field be joyful and all that is in it, then shall the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord;" and "Let the floods clap their hands and let the hills be joyful together before the Lord, for He cometh to judge the earth." "His righteousness remaineth for ever, His horn shall be exalted with honour."

Who ever saw a king with a horn growing out of

his head because the power of his kingdom had become great? But when we see him crushing down his enemies, we accept any apt symbol of power, force, strength, and overwhelming energy, though it may in reality have been the spear's point, the sword's gash, the poisoned arrow, the scalping knife, famine and thirst, that have done the work of terror. Whoever saw the little hills showing their joy by skipping and shouting and clapping their hands, or heard the heavens declare the glory of God, the firmament show His handiwork? "There is neither speech nor language, yet their voices are heard among them." But,

Though they have no speech nor voice,
In reason's ear they all rejoice,
For ever singing as they shine,
The hand that made us is divine.

Having then come to a justifiable conclusion of the argument that an additional use of symbols is

wise and necessary in every art, we are challenged as to the particulars claimed and used by artists, and I will begin by saying that it is a bold assertion of anatomists to say that a winged angel is impossible. Is anything too hard for the Lord ?

The two golden cherubim over the mercy-seat of the ark, and the figures of the cherubim in the linen curtains of the Jewish tabernacle, wrought by command, these were assurances of a spiritual world which the eye could not see. But this spiritual world was shown to Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah, and St. John. Ezekiel says, "The heavens were opened, and I saw the vision of God." He uses in writing it the same title, cherubim, for the four-faced living creatures in his vision by the river Chebar, and for that vision in the Lord's house. In chapter x. 20, "This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Chebar ; and I knew that they were cherubims. Each one had four faces

apiece, and every one four wings ; and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion on the right side, and they four had the face of an ox on the left side ; they four had the face of an eagle. Thus were their faces. And their wings were stretched upward, two wings of every one were joined one to another, and two covered their bodies." Also in the temple shown to Ezekiel, chapter xli. : "And it was made with cherubims and palm trees, so that a palm tree was between a cherub and a cherub, and every cherub had two faces : so that the face of a man was toward the palm tree on the one side, and the face of a young lion toward the palm tree on the other side ; it was made through all the house round about. From the ground unto above the door were cherubims and palm trees made, and on the wall of the temple." The doors also had these on them.

Now, in the vision of the chapters ix. and x.: "And behold, six men came from the way of the higher gate which lieth towards the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side, and they went in and stood beside the brazen altar." I quote this because of these men being seen in the same vision as the cherubim, and if these were merely symbolical, so those also must be considered. I do not see why the description of creatures strangely compounded in their nature should forcibly prove their unreality, obliging us to class them as symbolical visions only. On earth there are diversely formed creatures: the bat, the ornithorynchus paradoxus, the extinct pterodactyle, with many others known to the learned.

We ourselves are twofold, our two hands and two legs acting together, or agreeing in opposition. We are compounded, bodily and spiritually, with diverse

faculties, as the great command speaks, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." These diverse faculties may be related to the four-faced living creatures, the lion for heart or courage, the man for the living soul in the image of God, the eagle for mind, the ox for strength.

Must symbols be only evanescent, can they not be eternally real and existing? Is their glory only for the moment? and must it remind us of the clumsy, awkward work of man's invention, and not of the changeful excellence of some of the gifts of God's creation? Of the fowls of the air, some are ever on the wing and never on the water; others, as the sea-gulls, on the wing, or the water, or on land, making sport with the furious winds, they dip or rise, or skim over the turmoil of the waves with all the ease of enjoyment; while the swan seems awkward walking down to the water, when he floats, surpassingly graceful and

queen-like, rippling the calm surface with reflected beauty. So there may be in the unseen firmament spiritual servants in the kingdom of heaven, mantled, some with gorgeous wings that shade their faces from the exceeding great glory above them, and some who have another nature, other offices, and other powers.

From what we see then and we know of the riches of the creation in heaven, or in earth, or in the seas, is anything, it may be asked, too extraordinary, too unexpected to us men, too new, too great, or too minutely small, whether of structure, line, colour, action, speed or slowness, too thickly opaque, or crystalline clear, too enduring, or too momentary that the hand of the Lord cannot create ?

Speak ye who best can tell, ye sons of light,
Angels : for ye behold Him, and with songs
And choral symphonies, day without night,
Circle His throne rejoicing ; ye in heaven,
On earth join all ye creatures to extol
Him first, Him last, Him midst, and without end.

Yes, it is rather a bold assertion of the students of anatomy, for in this matter all are learners, that they should say, a winged angel is an impossible living structure ; that on the shoulders there is no room for wings to obtain such a mode of progression by muscular and bone machinery. For them

I talk of dreams
Which are the children of an idle brain,
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy,
Which is as thin of substance as the air,
And more inconstant than the wind.

These assertors of what the accumulated knowledge of Nature allows them to grant, these have been challenged to make wings or a flying balloon, and they have to avow a defeat of two thousand years. They know much of the works of the great Creator and not all of them. Silence on what may be done is therefore wisdom. Who would not laugh or sneer at a proposed arrangement of putting at the

end of a nose an arm which shall be strong enough to root up a tree, and withal so fine in power of grasp as to pick up a small coin ; neither solid, but hollow to serve as a trumpet ; soft and lithesome to embrace lovingly, hard to knock down heavily ? Such is the proboscis of the elephant ; the many and great uses of which limb the snout of the tapir would not seem to foreshow or suggest.

The human body has no room for a tail, yet with monkeys all kinds of tails are a possibility, the prehensile tail of one species curling round branches with great sensibility and grasp. The house-fly has room for only one pair of wings, walking on all surfaces as if the force of gravity were suspended. The butterfly has room for two pairs of wings, and these of wide spread and sweep. Is anything too hard for the Lord ?

St. Paul reproved the Corinthians for their ignorant disbelief of the resurrection of the body.

How could such regeneration ever be supposed possible by any but a madman? Festus, the governor, said to him, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." However, in his clear describing the growth of a corn grain, which miracle or wonder had always been before their dull senses, and yet had never been used to inform themselves of that higher knowledge which their souls longed to grasp, his wise words raised their dead intelligence to life. Sometimes I think why he did not also refer to the caterpillar, the chrysalis, and the butterfly, symbolizing the rising from earth-bound life into higher regions of existence, wider and more glorious.

We read also of another wonder in answer to an assertion often made, that no body could rise through the air from the ground. "And about the fourth watch of the night He cometh unto them walking on the sea, and would have passed by them. But when

they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it had been a spirit." Surely He who fixed the law of gravitation in the heavens and the earth could also suspend that law ; and the law suspended, the holy body would pass freely, up or down, in all directions through space. With the review then of these wonders of the realm of creation forced on our earth-bound senses, why should we not welcome the use of any symbol suggested by what we have unfolded to us ? Why not form our angels with wings to show that they are the speedy messengers from an invisible kingdom ? and why not class them, if our art needs it, with the more delicate forms of young innocent life, and model them of small proportions, giving thought of more quickness of action, submissiveness of will, readiness of affection, and in those instances where the more grand form of the full-grown man is not absolutely desired ? Our life is bound up with so many duties various in kind, va-

rious offices of help to dependent creatures, and may be shown by relatively higher or lower powers of angelic ministry. More so because of our ready experience that men and women differ in height, size, powers, and gifts, and are not of that regimental equality as seen in some weekly illustrated folio.

Therefore I enjoy the smallness of the tiny boys that sport around the huge river Nile of the Vatican Gallery, and the diminutive angels that guard our mediæval heroes in life's last moments. See the little ones that burden the broad shoulders of their father, or sport round him, trying their young strength; these are Nature's varied growths and energies, which cannot escape application to higher things.

FREDERICK THRUPP.

NOTE.—It has been suggested that there is not sufficient distinction in the argument between that domain of knowledge which includes only our boned and muscular body, of which

anatomists presume only to speak as they have learned, and the domain of the spiritual existence. Now we have proved outward resemblance of the two natures, the bodily and the spiritual, and there must be in one from the other utter difference of structure. The bold form of the human shoulder must have been like the angelic form outwardly, yet how different in structure and in substance—the one of heavy strength, fed with all that is solid, the other finer than air, perhaps thinner than light. We ought then, they may say, to indicate differing substances by different forms. But with this spiritual and eternally existing essence I rise to imagine any configuration of appliance, any complication of angle, of measure, height, breadth, and length that may please the great Author of Being to arrange. Here our learning is emptiness itself.

My position is this: the angel is a spiritual being, and although our fleshly body resembles it in outward form, it may not have been so *exactly* similar as to be a counterpart in shoulder-blade or muscular insertion. Anatomists are in error on this point.

